Officials Meet to Discuss Clare Community Concerns

Department of Education

News Releases

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Senior officials of the Department of Education met with representatives of education groups in the Clare-Weymouth area on Monday, Dec. 4 to discuss program offerings for students and the location of a new school in the area.

Deputy minister Dennis Cochrane and other department staff called the meeting to respond to local concerns related to the plan to build a new grade 7-12 school in St. Bernard. The school would be for the students in the Tri-County District School Board.

"As two school boards are involved, we can play a role in helping these communities reach consensus on some complex issues," said Jane Purves, Minister of Education. "However, the solution must come from the communities themselves."

Tenders have already been awarded on a new school at St. Bernard to house English students now sharing the high school at Clare. École Secondaire de Clare is also slated for a major upgrade.

This plan is the result of consultation with the two school boards and their school advisory committees. It is designed in part to implement the government of Nova Scotia's policy to have French-only instruction available in homogenous facilities across the province.

However, the construction plan--as well as the related changes in program offerings it implies--has stimulated considerable debate in the area. The availability of bilingual education, French-only programs, and French immersion are particular concerns.

Representatives from the Southwest Regional School Board, the Tri-County District School Board, the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, the Federation des Parents Acadiens de Nouvelle Écosse and the Bilingual Committee of Clare attended Monday's meeting. In addition, members of the school advisory committees of Weymouth Consolidated School and Clare District High School took part.

The meeting gave stakeholders an opportunity to discuss alternatives to the current school construction plan. Department officials put forward three options.

Option 1 is the current plan to build a new school at St. Bernard and to renovate École Secondaire de Clare and Weymouth Consolidated School.

Option 2 involves three projects:
-- the construction of a new grade 8-12 school at Church Point for Conseil scolaire students
-- a renovation at Weymouth Consolidated School to accommodate grades P-12 from the Weymouth area
-- a renovation at Clare District High School to accommodate Tri-County grades 7-12 students and French immersion students now at École de Baie Ste-Marie

Option 3 involves two projects:
-- a renovation at Weymouth Consolidated School to accommodate grades P-12 Tri-County students from both the Weymouth and Clare areas
-- a renovation at École Secondaire de Clare for grades 8-12 Conseil scolaire students.

Options 1 and 2 are estimated to cost about the same, and option 3 would cost less. New school construction projects, at either St. Bernard or Church Point, would be expected to cost in the range of $11 million.

Groups are expected to seek advice from their constituents over the next week. They have until Dec. 13 to submit an agreed-upon alternative plan.

The deputy minister emphasized that the minister could only consider a new proposal that has received consensus approval of all affected stakeholder groups.

The plan to construct the new school at St. Bernard will move forward immediately if consensus cannot be reached.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

The Department of Education met with groups in the Clare-Weymouth area on Monday, December 4th, to discuss program offerings for students and the location of a new school in the area.

The meeting was called to address local concerns related to a new school to be built in St. Bernard for the students in the Tri-County District School Board.

While the department put forward three options, Education Minister Jane Purves says the solution must come from the communities themselves.

The groups have until December 13th to submit an agreed-upon alternative plan.

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